



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE  
FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**

**FEBRUARY 18, 2014**

**SUPPORTING RAISED S.B. No. 98**

**AN ACT ESTABLISHING STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL SECURITY  
PERSONNEL**

Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.

My name is Lara Herscovitch, and I am deputy director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We support evidence-based prevention to keep children from entering the system as well as services to help kids who do enter the system to be successful. The Alliance has been active in school-based arrest reduction. Our executive director serves on Keep the Promise's children's committee, which advocates for better mental health services in schools. The Alliance also partnered with several Connecticut communities to form partnerships among police, schools and community organizations. These partnerships were highly successful in reducing arrests in public schools.

I would like to address SB 98, An Act Establishing Standards for Public School Security Personnel. The Alliance strongly supports training and standards for people taking on this important role. We are concerned, however, that the only two areas addressed in the language of the bill are "drug detection" and "gang identification."

Guidelines released by the federal government last month on school climate and discipline, as well as our own experience in Connecticut schools, clearly show that the primary role of school resource officers and other security personnel should be to protect and mentor students – not to arrest them.

Schools are a significant feeder to the juvenile justice system. In 2012-13, CSSD found that 13 percent of juvenile arrests that made it to court began in schools. This is down from 19 percent a couple of years ago. A high number of these arrests are for misbehavior, such as dress code violations or speaking disrespectfully, that would have been handled without involving police a generation ago. Connecticut Voices for Children analysis of 2011-2012 school year data showed that black students were 3.7 times and Hispanic students 3.2 times more likely to be arrested than white students.

Arresting a child is a big deal. It reduces the chances that he or she will graduate and increases the chances of further involvement with the juvenile and/or criminal justice system. School security personnel must be trained to keep schools safe without making arrest a default response.

The federal Department of Education guidelines released last month suggest that: "Officers should be trained on how to distinguish between, and appropriately respond to, disciplinary infractions appropriately handled by school officials on the one hand, and major threats to safety or serious criminal conduct that requires law enforcement involvement on the other.

"Training for school-based law enforcement officers should also address such topics as basic childhood and adolescent development, age-appropriate responses, disability issues, and conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques. Other necessary topics are bias-free policing

(including implicit or unconscious bias and cultural competence), restorative justice practices, and how to identify and refer for services for those students exposed to trauma and violence. Given the specificity of a school context, the training should cover special considerations related to law enforcement activity in a school setting, working with specific groups of students, such as those at risk for dropping out of school, trauma, social exclusion or behavioral incidents. In addition, training should review the negative collateral consequences associated with youth involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems..." (End of quotation.)

Connecticut has made important strides in reducing student arrests through the actions of the Judicial Branch and many of our non-profit colleagues. The state's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, on which I serve, has created a model Memorandum of Understanding for communities that want to define the difference between enforcing the law and enforcing school discipline. The JJAC also offers grants to schools with model programs to improve safety and behavior while cutting down on arrests.

I've had the privilege of working with several communities that used these memorandums as a springboard for intensive work to improve behavior, raise student achievement and increase safety – all while reducing student arrests. Manchester High School was able to reduce its student arrest rate by 78 percent in a single year. Manchester Police Chief Marc Montminy describes the school, which once had a large problem with student fights, as a different place and "definitely safer." It's programs like these that have helped drop the percentage of arrests from school from 19 to 13 percent.

We all want our children to go to schools that are safe. We also want those schools to be environments where kids feel valued and supported. To have both, we need to give school security personnel training that helps them understand child development and clarifies their own role in the schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Alliance member organizations:**

AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI Connecticut and the Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children